
**Internment: The Impact of Internment on Issei and Nisei's
Identity in Philip Kan Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto***

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Abstract:

During World War II, more than 110 000 Japanese Americans including those Americans of Japanese roots were forced into interior camps after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This experience left indelible scars on the Japanese Americans.

Gotanda's play *Sisters Matsumoto* (1998) unfolds the history of Japanese Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. The dramatist shows the reaction of the Japanese Americans to the challenges of the American system and American people post war era. This paper aims at exploring the psychological effect and racism of the Alien Land Law of 1913 and Internment camps experience on the Issei and Nisei's family after World War II, and consequently their sense of belonging. Gotanda uses Fanon's notion of "inferiority complex" and "whitening" to show the effect of discrimination and racism on the Japanese Americans. The playwright gives an image of a Japanese American family which seeks to survive and overcome this traumatic experience through their cooperation, solidarity, and fortitude.

Philip Kan Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto* (1998) sets in Stockton in 1945. It describes the painful experience of a Japanese American family returning to "their once-proud family household crumbling into a shameful eyesore" in Stockton (Kaplan 2002,74). They find the words "Japs Go Home" on the walls of the house (*Matsumoto* 6). Furthermore, they find their farm and machinery in miserable conditions. Besides the warehouse has been looted (Lehman 2011, 35). The family consists of three daughters: the older sister, Grace, who is married to a former University professor, Hideo; the middle

sister, Chiz, an "assimilationist" woman who is married to a Hawaiian physician, Bola, and the youngest sister, Rose, whose fiancé' died in a Japanese American combat and who is later engaged to Henry (Ibid.).

Before the war, the three sisters had a high standard life. Their father, Togo Matsumoto, was a wealthy owner of a potato farm. But after the war and after the death of their father in a snow storm, their circumstances change greatly, "the prosperity, elegance and high status they left behind when they were suddenly shipped off to Arkansas have been destroyed" (Adcock 1999, 12). As they are born in the United States, the three sisters feel that their liberties and constitutional rights were violated by the country where they were born. They feel that they belong to nowhere.

Gotanda in his internment plays tackles, in fact, the experience of the internment after the war in order to scrutinize the psychological impact of racism and camp experience on the Japanese Americans "including internalized racism and self-hatred" (Guiyou Huang 2009; Kaplan 2002). He portrays the effects of the internment on the life of the Japanese and their American –born children .

When asked about the effect of the camp experience on him as a Japanese American and a playwright, Gotanda speaks of his heart-felt experiences:

My parents' experience continues to inform my work and life on a conscious and on an unconscious level. I've exploited themes of its psychic scar in *American Tattoo* (1982), the subsequent internalized racism being passed on from generation to generation in *Fish Head Soup* (1986), and its immediate psychological aftermath in *Sisters Matsumoto* (1999). (Ito 2000,175)

Lynn Jacobson in his article "Sisters Matsumoto" points out the terrible acts committed against Japanese American citizens:

The internment of more than 100,000 Japanese-American citizens during World War II was certainly one of the most dramatic events of this American century. The irony is inescapable: one of the greatest democracies in the history of the world unjustly imprisoned a portion of its own population, in the name of battling fascism abroad.

Within the same context, the first and second generation Japanese Americans (Issei and Nisei) suffered from the sense of humiliation after being incarcerated in barbed wire camps (Torky 2013, 148). They were considered threat to national security. They were treated as criminals though they convicted no crimes. They were given numbers as their identities (Takaki 1989, 379). So, as human beings, Japanese Americans felt they lost their identities. Kristine C. Kuramitsu (1995), in " Internment and Identity in Japanese Art," depicts the negative impact of this historical period on the Japanese psyche:

Wartime imprisonment constituted a 'shameful' episode for the Japanese- American community. For years, a heavy silence hung over the 1940s; in many families, parents attempted to keep the fact that they had been interned from their children. (621)

It seems that silence over shame is part of the Japanese American cultural background. According to Savin (1992), Japanese accept shame with silence (229). Perhaps they think that they will be compensated in the future. That is why they conceal the internment experience from their children.

The daughters in *Sisters Matsumoto* remember their father saying, "that [they'd] be let out as soon as the government realized its mistake" (*Matsumoto* 47). This is a prophetic vision of the old man. The American government recognised the faults that have done to a portion of its people. President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which provided a formal apology and redress of (\$20 000) for Japanese Americans who were unjustly interned during World War II (Takaki 1989, 485).

As a matter of fact, the Internment had exerted very negative impact on the Japanese American families. According to Elaine H. Kim, parents were no longer able to guide and control their children, since they did not see them most of the time and hesitated to scold within hearing of the neighbours since they are separated by paper-thin walls (1982, 134). In the play *Chiz marries Bola*, who is not chosen by her father. It seems that Togo agrees to the marriage because his

daughter is pregnant. In order to escape this shame, her father consents to their union.

In *Sisters Matsumoto*, past and history are crucial parts of the play (Torky 2013,149). After their return to their household the Matsumoto sisters remember old days. Their talk about the past is an attempt to escape their miserable condition. Maczyn'ska points out, that throughout the play, the reader senses the presence of the war and camp experience, since Gotanda exposes the painful subjects of ethnic hatred and confinement (20003,124). Like other Japanese Americans, the sisters have to confront the poignant consequences of the internment.

Just like Hwang, Goanda's interest in history is to show the way to the future generations:

In my writing I have looked back in time, at my parents and my grandparents, who lived in Japan. I figured that if I told their stories I could move on to my own generation, and then on to speculating about what life might be like for the next generation of Japanese Americans. (qtd. in Berson 1990, 32)

If Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto* is considered a play that narrates history or a history play, then, and according to Josephine Lee, it is among the plays which look at history as triumphing over the past:

in their insistence on the emotional self and the authentic voice, support a reading of history as an ultimate triumph over the evils of the past, where the past can be known and commandeered to fit the agendas of the present. The authentic Asian American spirit is pictured as heroic, able to insist on self-worth and expressiveness in excess of a character's purely functional role. (1997,158-159)

Accordingly, *Sisters Matsumoto* depicts the authentic voice of the Japanese Americans and present the Matsumoto sisters and their husbands as heroes. By this Gotanda is following the steps of Frank Chin, the pioneer of the Asian American drama. Nevertheless, the following exchange between Grace and Rose illustrates Grace's determination to regain their image and their status as being privileged Matsumoto's family:

ROSE: I thought if I could make it in Stockton, just make it here, walk down Main Street, say hello to people, see them look back smile ... I don't know who I am anymore, where we fit in. [...]

GRACE: That's why we have to stay who we are. Not lose ourselves. Always remember we are Matsumotos. That's the only thing we can hold on to. The only thing nobody can take from us. We are Matsumotos. (*Matsumoto* 15)

From here, Grace is proud of her Japanese background and her identity as a Japanese American. She, thus, subverts the "doll stereotype" attributed to the Asian woman (Torky 2013,149). She is strong enough to take the role of her father in the family, make decisions, and challenge difficult circumstances. The dramatis confirms this image, when he includes this play in a collection entitled *No More Cherry Blossoms*. In the preface to this collection, Gotanda speaks of the Asian woman:

The image of cherry blossoms, while on the one hand an intoxicating picture of temporal beauty, has also unfortunately become associated with the fantasized world of *oriental tradition* where Asian women can only serve, defer, and follow. I felt *No More Cherry Blossoms* was a fitting title for this collection of plays. (xvi)

Grace is a good example of the Asian American woman who is strong, active, and independent. She challenges the Asian American woman's stereotype as weak, passive, and obedient. By this Grace is like Massi in Gotanda's *The Wash*. Massi, in her old age, escapes the maltreatment of her husband, depends on herself, and takes the decision of divorce. She sets off to start a new life with another man, Sadao.

Unlike Grace, who is proud of her Japanese roots, Chiz believes that the only solution to get rid of the burdens imposed on her race is through discarding her Japanese identity and embracing the American one (Torky 2013,150). By this she is like Dale in David Henry Hwang's *FOB*. In this particular sense, Hwang states in his introduction to *FOB*:

Our inability to become white at will produce terrible self-loathing. My first play, *FOB*, dealt largely with this dilemma. Certainly the

American-born character Dale loathes the "Fresh-off-the-Boat" Steve precisely because the latter represents all the identification Dale has spent a lifetime attempting to avoid.(xi)

Like Dale, Chiz longs to be accepted and belong in the white society, but her inability to be white makes her develop a sense of self-loathing. She hates her people because they remind her of everything she tries to forget. Consequently, she pictures the Japanese Americans as:

A bunch of scared rabbits- go to the same church, go to the same social clubs, eat Japanese food, celebrate Japanese holidays, still speak the language, even have Japanese school so their kids can speak Japanese ...After what happened- my kids are only going to speak English. ... Oh, I get rid of their Japanese middle names.

(*Matsumoto* 19)

Interestingly, Chiz's words are similar to Dale's when criticizes, Steve or FOB (Fresh off the Boat). Dale describes him as "Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, ..? Big feet. ... Someone you wouldn't want your sister to marry." (*FOB* 7-8) Chiz attempts to improve her social standing by associating herself with the whites. Like Dale, she is a typical representative of those "social climbers" (Torky 2013, 151). She wants to be part of the dominant society since her childhood. She, also, wants her children to play with the whites and "celebrate every American Holiday" (*Matsumoto* 58,19). She has been obsessed with the idea of "whitening" since her childhood (Torky 2013,151). Sam Antony in "Identity Crisis in Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks," points out that people who suffer from inferiority complex try to absorb the whites traits in order to be accepted in the white society and be equal with them (1, 2013). Thus, Chiz feels that the whites are superior. So, she tries to alienate herself from her own culture to be accepted in the dominant society.

In the following exchange, Grace shows Chiz's aggressive feelings towards her people :

GRACE: Why are you so ashamed of being Japanese?

CHIZ: I 'm not.

GRACE: Yes, you are.

CHIZ: No, I 'm not.

GRACE: Yes, yes, you are. Being Japanese was never good enough for you. You've always had to have white friends-be around them, have them like you.

CHIZ: I'm not ashamed of being Japanese Grace. I'm not. It's just... I just don't want it to get in the way of us being American.

(*Matsumoto 20*)

Chiz seems to be more attached to the whites rather than her own people. This is shown through various means and acts. Later, she enters wearing a tight sweater and a big and pointy bust. The fact that being American of Japanese roots, depressed Chiz, that is why she resorts to the white's life style:

CHIZ: Like [th]em? The Betty Grable model. Got [th]em in a specialty shop in St. Louis, just before we had the baby. I was depressed about my figure so I wanted to treat myself, something to look forward to. We're all so depressed now. I thought I'd try [th]em out again. (*Matsumoto 57*)

She tries to discard her identity as a Japanese American and embrace the whites' identity instead. She is just like Dale in *FOB* who has the same feelings towards the whites and wants to assimilate. A Sansei poet, Ron Tanka, observes, "Japanese American assimilation, is thinly disguised self-hatred, a response to race discrimination" (Elaine Kim 1882, 230). No doubt, Chiz's assimilation is a response to race discrimination and self-hatred. Chiz's sense of inferiority is intensified after World War II and after Internment experience.

Chiz defends the white American people blindly. When her husband, Bola, tells her about the troubles he has faced while attempting to hire a place to start his job as a physician, she defends the American people and ignores the sacrifices of the Japanese Americans of 100th Battalion and 442nd Regiment Combat Team who served this country during the war. The following exchange illustrates her biased attitude towards the Japanese and Japanese Americans:

BOLA: You know how I 've been having trouble finding office space to rent? Well, this one I called before I went. I didn't want to waste my time.

CHIZ: That's not where it happened.

BOLA: I'm trying to set the story up. On the phone-"Fine, fine, come on down- we have several offices available." The guy takes one look at me and I can tell." Sorry we already rented the offices." So what can I do? Just the way he avoided looking me in the eye, you can tell...

(Chiz enters.)

CHIZ: He's imagining it. If they didn't want to rent you because you're

Japanese, they'd just tell you. Why would they have to lie Bola?...

[]

BOLA: ... But the 100th and the 442nd – the all-Japanese American units... Shig dies, Tak dies, George loses his leg, Paul loses his arm... to prove they were loyal Americans. And they proved it with their blood.

(Matsumoto 24-26)

In relating this incident, Bola describes discrimination and racism of the American system and American people post war. He is just like Steve in *FOB*. He tries to negotiate the racist image perpetuated about his people (Torky 2013,153).

As the events progress, the audience finds out that the Matsumoto family is not only suffering from the Internment experience and its aftermath, but also from the " sudden discovery" that their father has sold their farm to San Joaquin Bank without consulting them before his death (Ibid.). Mr. Hersham, their neighbour and their father's old friend, unfolds this truth:

HERSHAM: Your father sold the place. He sold the land, this house, everything.

GRACE: What?

HIDEO: When did this happen?

HERSHAM: When I visited you in Camp, remember?

GRACE: Yes, but he never mentioned it to us, he never mentioned it once.

HIDEO: He sold it to you then?

HERSHAM: No, no, I didn't buy it. The Bank of San Joaquin bought it. I just brought the offer. I was out that way. So they asked me to act on their behalf and bring it.

(Matsumoto 44)

Issei suffered a lot despite their hard working and loyalty to the American system. As an Issei, Togo Matsumoto, felt that he would never be an American citizen, since the Issei were forced to register their lands in American-born children's names according to the Alien Land Law (1913) (Elaine Kim 1982, 133). As alien strangers, Japanese immigrants were denied naturalization. Consequently, they saw this as a convincing "proof that they would never be accepted into American society" (Ibid.). Togo never told his daughters about the selling, he might want them to come back to Japan to avoid the anti- sentiment and prejudice of the American society.

However, by this time, the Motsumotos have to face their new financial difficulties besides their psychological and social scars. Now they start to inquire about the validity of the act of selling the farm, they find themselves facing the unavoidable fact; i.e. since they have a Japanese root, they lose their rights as American civilians (Torky 2013, 153). They are the despised races as explained in the following exchange:

CHIZ: What'd you find out?

HIDEO: It's all legal. It's been sold.

GRACE: I remember now. Papa gave me a bunch of papers to sign. When Mr. Hershman was visiting. I should have known something was funny. Papa kept pushing me: hayaku, hayaku.

HIDEO: We have to get out by this weekend. They want to start things down.

GRACE: Oh, hi, Henry.

ROSE: If you didn't know what you were signing, is the sale legal?

CHIZ: Who do you think they'll believe you in court? The bank or some Japs that just got out of prison?

(Matsumoto 49-50)

The selling of the farm is confirmed. The Matsumotos feel they cannot revive their previous status. They have to find out a way out to their dilemma. They have lost their property and their father. According to Samuel Park (2006), Togo Matsumoto, despite his death, is always viewed "in the image of the spiritual and materialistic protector of the family" (220). By losing the farm Grace loses the hope of reviving her former position in society (Torky 2013,155). Unlike Steve in Hwang's *FOB* who keeps resisting to the end of the play, she yields to the destiny imposed on her people (Ibid.,154-155). She seems to blame her husband for paying much attention to his people in :

GRACE: We just lost everything and here you are worried about the people over in Japan? What about us?

HIDEO: What about us?

GRACE: What do we do now?Huh? What we are supposed to do?

(Matsumoto 53)

Grace here tries to attract her husband's attention to their situation as Japanese Americans in a dilemma, while Hideo as a Kibei insists on helping his people in Japan.

Greg Robinson in " A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America," indicates that Japanese Americans organize political groups and find their way to resist. They express their defiance and anger through various acts such as strikes or riots (2010,2). It seems that Hideo, as a Kibei, is one of the Japanese Americans who takes part in the camp's riots as indicated by Grace :

GRACE: Why you are always thinking about Japan? You and your Kibei friends. "Japan is great," waving flags and shouting "Banzai!" With my Papa being such an important figure in Camp-do you know how that made me look?

HIDEO: So what should I do? Pretend I was happy they put us in Camp like your father? Japan never did that to me. What was I supposed to do ? Huh?

(*Matsumoto 53*)

There is a contradiction in the two situations of Grace's father and husband that embarrassed her in the camp. Togo as an Issei hides his feelings of shame as part of his culture, while Hideo as a Kibei is angry because of the bad treatment of the American system that discriminates against minorities. According to Elaine Kim, the *kibei* think that what they have been taught in Japan is true, that the United States is a racist country to which "they owed no allegiance" (Elaine H. Kim 1982,133). Hideo's talk about the internment experience seems contemptuous of the American West. Here, Hideo is considered a perfect example of the Japanese American man, who is much concerned with his people and their sufferings, by this he converts the circulated image of the Asian man as passive (Takaki 1989, 476). From here, it is apparent that all these claims and unfair pretense about the Asians could be negotiated and challenged; therefore, their "fixity" is questioned and distrusted (Torky 2013, 155).

The deceit of the Western man is revealed when the Matsumotos discover that Mr. Hersham, whom they consider their father's most faithful friend, is the one who persuades him of selling the farm to San Joaquin Bank (Ibid., 155-156). He does not inform Togo Matsumoto that they have found out gas on his land. By this, Mr. Hersham is capable to pay his debts to the bank. After being exposed of deceiving his friend and having prejudice and hostility against the Japanese race, he suggests that he tries to help Togo:

I tried to help him. Think anybody else would? Hell no, it's war time. People hate Japanese. But I helped him because we were friends,[...]. Your people are over there killing our boys. American boys. Hey, the

camps, this farm, all that's happened to you- whose fault is this whole thing, anyway? Who started this whole thing in the first place? Was it me? Was it the Bank of San Joaquin? Was it Pacific Gas? No. Ask yourselves, really ask yourselves. If the Japs hadn't bombed Pearl Harbor, would you be in the mess you're in today?

(*Matsumoto* 65-66)

Hersham's words confirm the Western stereotypical image of the Japanese and Japanese Americans, which is fixed. Said says the idea of "fixity" is western (Said 1978,26). It is created by the Occidental's assumption (Said 1978, 4). So, Hersham represents the dominant society which attempts to justify its unjust practices through a number of clichéd notions about the dismissed people (Torky 2013, 155). The late Filipino American poet Serafin Syquia, however, encourages the Asian American youth to define themselves rather than be defined by others who might destroy them (Kim 1982, 230).

In this particular sense, Daisuke Nishihara in his article " Said, Orientalism, and Japan" suggests:

The Western discourse on Japan, ..., was characterized by dictatorship, fanaticism, and cruelty. The representation of Samurai warriors was created along this image. The traditional of *harakiri* suicide and even the *kamikaze* attack during World War II was interpreted as evidence of the barbaric characteristics of the Japanese. Samurai swords were the key image of violence...

(2005, 246)

Thus, the West has the fixed idea about the east (Japan and Japanese Americans here) as violent people. Therefore, the West justifies its unfair practices towards the Japanese and Japanese American through their fixed stereotype of violence committed by the Japanese and the Samurai sword.

It is worth noting, that many works of art in Japanese language, such as diaries and journals, were destroyed by the Issei since they fear these writings might cause problems concerning their loyalty to the United States (Kim 1982,137). Nevertheless, the following poems unfold their feelings about the evacuation:

As one

Of the Japanese

I gather my belongings

(Keiho)

I leave behind

Not only you

My California

(Shocho)

Loyalty, disloyalty if one should ask I cannot answer (Toshuo)

(qtd in Ibid.,138)

In the same context and at a moment of despair and frustration, the Matsumotos decide to burn all things; they don't want the Americans to benefit from their belongings once again. Grace speaks of burning:

Let's burn things. I want to burn things. (*Silence*) Like Papa did when the FBI started taking people away. Some people buried their Japanese things, Papa had a bonfire. [...] I don't want strangers walking through the house touching our things. [...] I want to burn things. [...] Things that don't want to be attached to. Things that want to let go of. Last time they forced us to leave, what did we do? Huh? We trusted people to look after our things and look what they did to us. That's not going to happen again. This time, they're not going to do that to us.

(*Matsumoto*59-60)

Grace decides that these strangers will not intrude with their things again. She learns a valuable lesson. Therefore, She will leave nothing to these deceitful people.

Yet, these negative sentiments would not last forever since the family gathers at the end and exchanges thoughts and solutions to their problems. This is done by the aid of Henry who would be Rose's fiancé'. They decide to use the money of the farm's sale. They decide

to repair a damaged hotel for the sake of leasing it to the Japanese that have been released from internment camps. So, they find residence to their family and people of their community. Besides they make the hotel a place for their work. This suggestion comes from Henry:

My brother Tasakhi? He wrote me that some of the Japanese who got out from the camps early couldn't find places to stay. So some of them chipped in together and bought boarding houses. This is out in Chicago? That way, they at least had their own place to stay and they could rent to other Japanese who were coming out.[...]

(Matsumoto 69)

Gotanda here portrays the various means that have been followed by the Japanese Americans in order to reestablish an independent community of their own at this period of history (Torky 2013,158). They assist each other in housing, in finding jobs, etc. In a similar way to Hwang , who reflects part of the Chinese American literary heritage in *FOB*, Gotanda in this play highlights significant Japanese cultural values such as: "hard-working, family cohesion, patience, self-sufficiency, and group solidarity" (Ibid.). Stephen H. Sumida (2005), points out in the foreword of *No More Cherry Blossoms*:

In his body of works, Gotanda is constructing a Japanese America that is held together despite, this community's loss of actual residence and neighborhood in what before World War II were the Nihonmachi, Japantowns, and Little Tokyos of American cities. Such as it is, Japanese America is a connection among people (and Gotanda's characters) scattered from Hawai' to New York, with the West Coast and Chicago between ... (xii)

For the Matsumoto the boarding house would not be a place of their residence, but also a place of their future jobs. Grace and Chiz would run the hotel. Rose would open a pharmacy downstairs. Hideo would establish his career as a journalist, Bola as a doctor. Being optimistic, Henry speaks:

They [the Americans] never liked us. You just didn't notice it. You didn't have to. My father taught me to make the most out of things. No matter what's there or not there. You have to adapt. That's why I

invent things, try new techniques, Rose. Tomorrow's going to be different, whether we like it or not. It doesn't have to be bad.

(Matsumoto72)

Henry's words reflect the Japanese American inherited spirit of fortitude, adaptation, strength, and optimism. This is positive image of the Japanese American family which has strong determination to establish its future and resist the stereotype attributed to their race, the "fixity" of Western discourse, is "negotiated, countered and defeated" (Torky 2013, 159). By exploring the "authentic" features of the Japanese American family, Gotanda confirms the Japanese American identity.

The dramatist thinks that what is important for him is telling the truth and that the dramatist should not adapt his writing to satisfy the audience. This is dangerous for a writer (Ito 2000, 178). By telling the truth Gotanda creates a family play that exposes a post-war Japanese American identity.

In this particular sense, Michael Omi describes Gotanda's "cultural specificity ... [as] strategically utiliz[ing] ... a way of affording his audience a more expansive look at who and what America really is" (xvii; qtd.in Kaplan 2002,73). In this play, Gotanda not only tells a story, but widens the audience's perspective about a significant part of the American history:

Concerning the impact of the internment on his writing, Gotanda says "Whether you speak about the Camps or don't speak about them, the experience is passed on generationally ... It's a psychic scar"

(qtd.in Ibid.,74).

The play, however, ends in a hopeful note as the three sisters dream of the flourishing future while the sun is rising. This image is a symbol of the prosperous future (Torky 2013,159). Grace says to her sisters, "It'll be all right. Whatever happens. We'll be all right" (*Matsumoto* 74). So, the negative stereotype will be changed by the Matsumoto's family by discovering a means of living and reconciliation with their own roots. They refuse to be perceived and

fixed in the image of "silent shadows animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him." (Said 1978, 208)

Gotanda not only explores the impact of the internment on his people, but he also reveals part of the Japanese American culture "the internal class structure" (Ito 2000,175). Togo refuses to marry his daughter, Grace, to the son of a farmer who works in his farm. He arranges her marriage to Hideo, a professor instead. Grace obeys her father's desire. It is part of her Japanese background that she should respect her father's decision and obey it. Gotanda speaks of the family integration after internment:

I'd always been interested in the period right after the camps and what families had to go through in reintegrating back into American society. Also, this period has not been explored extensively in literature. Another area of interest to me was the internal class structures of "ethnic" communities and their relationships to the larger culture. In *Sisters Matsumoto* I have explored these themes. This story mirrors the history of my mother's life. (xvii)

Gotanda also says: "Since I'm Japanese-American, it would seem at some point in my life I'd have to write my 'camp' play,[...] I began to look around and I found that there was a period right after the camps ... that wasn't covered and I didn't know anything about" (qtd. in Trussell 2000). Therefore, the play is written through the Japanese American perspective.

At the end of the play, Hideo decides to print his newspaper in two languages Japanese and English. It seems that Gotanda is against total assimilation. He sees the Japanese American identity through their culture. In this play, it is the family's cohesion, strength and determination that enable them to go on and cherish dreams. Assimilation leads the individual to lose his cultural heritage and to ends non-Anglo. Elaine Kim clarifies this point:

The anguished battle cry of many racial minorities against racism was a rejection of the notion of assimilation into what they viewed as the spiritual bankruptcy, cultural sterility, imperialism, materialism, and racial self-denial of the Anglo-American ideal...(1982, 224)

The Asian American's search for ways to articulate the emerging Asian American identity involves trying to identify with Asian cultures (Elaine Kim 1982, 242). Without their roots, Asian Americans cannot affirm their identity.

Thus, the anger expressed in the new Asian American literature is not the anger of alienation: it is a fierce urge towards affirmation, unity, and community, for artists, like true revolutionaries, can achieve greatness through love for humanity as manifested in hatred for injustice (Elaine Kim 1982, 248).

The Chinese American novelist, Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-), remarks that Asian Americans have to fight and be warriors not victims (Elaine Kim 1982, 252). Kingston recognizes the significance of the challenge of her people to identify themselves as Asian American.

Interestingly, in its article "Why Are So Few Sansei Writers?" "Wakayama Group of Vancouver, British Columbia, remarks that :

[T]he first obligation of the Sansei, and in particular the Sansei artist, is to regain his true past. Japanese life was rich and full [of] all the joys, hardships and complexity of a living people. Unless we preserve the essence of that life, it will be lost forever. [W]e need to understand [the past] before we can have a realistic sense of the future.

(Wakayama Group

1972, 21)

The Wakayama Group urges the Sansei artists to preserve their cultural past. Otherwise, the future will be lost. Since tradition and heritage are the primary components of the Japanese American identity, there is an emphasis on them. The Group confirms that assimilation is a "cultural genocide" because it threatens to rob their true past and, at the same time, prevents them from "full and equal participation in the present" (Elaine Kim 1982, 228). One reason that some Asian Americans identified with Afro-Americans stems from a desire to reject assimilation according to the white racist standards (Ibid., 241).

Among the components of the Asian American identity is feelings of interdependence with family (Ibid.,173). This is obvious in Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto*. It is through the Matsumoto family's exchange of ideas, thoughts, and their decision to find solutions to their problems that they prove themselves true Japanese Americans who are able to make the best of the eastern and western traditions. As an Asian American dramatist, Gotanda is proud of his identity. He points out in his biographical note to *The Wash*, "As I define myself as an Asian-American writer, I find two themes keep coming up: one is the Camps, the other is racism in general (qtd.in Berson 1990, 30)

In this play the dramatist achieves his aim in writing about the experience of the Japanese American in the Internment Camps and about racism.

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